

## EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SPACES IN URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

**Rajjan Man Chitrakar, Douglas C Baker and Mirko Guaralda**

Queensland University of Technology, 2 George Street, Brisbane, Queensland 4000, Australia

Corresponding author's email address: razn77@hotmail.com; rajjan.chitrakar@qut.edu.au

### Abstract

*The lack of management has led to the degrading quality of public space in modern cities around the globe. Contemporary public spaces are facing challenges in terms of maintaining them as a "social space" so that they are accessible and functional for the users. Using Kathmandu as a case study, this paper explores the challenges the contemporary public spaces within urban neighbourhoods are facing in their management. The study reveals that the regulation of use is a major concern of public space management in the new neighbourhoods of Kathmandu as evident in the limited accessibility and utility of public space, due to control and commercialisation. The use of public space has also been affected by the lack of regular maintenance. The root cause of these problems lies in weak urban governance at the neighbourhood level, which has led the local community-based organisations to take a role in neighbourhood management. These findings confirm that the management of public space is a critical issue of urban development with commonalities existing across geographical regions that demand adequate consideration from the stakeholders.*

**Keywords:** Public space; management of public space; new neighbourhoods; Kathmandu

### INTRODUCTION

Public space is an integral part of urban life. Human beings are gregarious and expected to meet (Lennard & Lennard, 1995), and public space acts as "the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds" (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992, p. 3). Tibbalds (2001) argues that the public realm is the important part of cities where the significant amount of human contact and interaction takes place. Successful public spaces are designed and developed in such a way that they are accessible and can attract a range of use and activities, providing an opportunity for socialisation among the users. Public space is thus the "common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in the normal routines of daily life or in periodic festivals" (Carr et al., 1992, p. xi).

Despite its significance in urban life as the "common social platform", scholars argue that the quality of public space is deteriorating in modern urban environment. For example, Gehl and Gemzoe (2001) explain that public space has changed dramatically in modern cities with traffic and parking, which has gradually displaced the pedestrian space. They refer to the invasion of urban space made possible by the impact of the growing use of automobiles. The car-invaded spaces have had negative effects on public life as the authors note that "not much physical space is left, and when other restrictions and irritants such as dirt, noise and visual pollution are added, it does not take long to impoverish city life" (Gehl & Gemzoe, 2001, p. 14). Tibbalds (2001, p. 1) claims that there is a decline of public realm in modern urban environment because the new public spaces lack maintenance as they are neglected, and too often "littered, piled with rotting rubbish, covered in graffiti, polluted, congested and choked by traffic, full of mediocre and ugly poorly maintained buildings, unsafe, populated at night by homeless people living in cardboard boxes, doorways and subways and during the day by many of the same people begging on the streets".

Trancik (1986) uses the term “lost space” to denote the vast array of modernist public spaces that have no “character”, and are “antispaces” with no positive contribution to the users. Examples of lost spaces include “the leftover unstructured landscape at the base of high-rise towers or the unused sunken plazas away from the flow of pedestrian activity in the city ... the abandoned waterfronts, train yards, vacated military sites, and industrial complexes that have moved to the suburbs for easier access and perhaps lower taxes ... deteriorated parks and marginal public – housing projects that have to be rebuilt because they do not serve their intended purpose” (Trancik, 1986, pp. 3-4).

Historically, other scholars such as Jane Jacobs (1961) and Oscar Newman (1973) maintain that the poor quality urban spaces of modern cities reflect a considerable level of challenge that they have to face in terms of the management of public space. Indeed, the lack of management of public space offers several problems in “maintaining” these spaces as a “social space”. While traditional public space management arrangements are changing in terms of urban governance and public services provision (Carmona, de Magalhães, & Hammond, 2008), the management of contemporary public space has now emerged as a key issue of urban development in the cities around the globe.

The issue appears to be more pertinent in developing countries like Nepal, where the contemporary urban growth has largely taken place unplanned and uncontrolled (ADB, 2001; ICIMOD, UNEP, & Government of Nepal, 2007), with a direct impact on the quality of urban public space (Adhikari, 1998; Shrestha, 2005). Recent studies on Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, suggest that the problems with the management of contemporary public spaces are a significant issue that has failed to receive adequate consideration from government agencies (Chitrakar, Baker, & Guaralda, 2016; Shrestha & Shrestha, 2006). This paper explores the challenges the contemporary public spaces in Kathmandu are facing in their management. The study examines how public spaces are managed in Kathmandu’s new neighbourhoods within the context of the current urban growth and change. In addition to open space, the examination of public space in this study also includes community buildings because such buildings are also owned and managed by community, with an equal potential to act as a platform for social gathering.

## THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE

De Magalhães and Carmona (2009, p. 112) define public space management as “the set of processes and practices that attempt to ensure that public space can fulfil all its legitimate roles, while managing the interactions between, and impacts of, those multiple functions in a way that is acceptable to its users”. They have conceptualised public space management as being made up of four interlinked processes that apply whether its activities are undertaken by public sector agencies, by or community-based organisations, or by private sector companies (p. 113) (see figure 1):

- *The regulation of uses and conflicts between uses* – Regulation sets out how public spaces should be used, sets a framework for solving conflicts between uses, determines rules of access and established acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.
- *The maintenance routines* – This concerns anything from ensuring that public spaces are usable, uncluttered, clean and safe, maintaining the surfaces of roads, street furniture, lighting, vegetation and facilities of all types; to removing anything that might deface or offend the symbolism invested in civic spaces; to occasional capital intensive replacement of parts of the public realm.
- *The new investments into and ongoing resourcing of public space* – Regulating uses and conflicts and physically maintaining public spaces require resources – financial and material. The degree to which regulatory instruments and maintenance routines can be effective is linked to the amount of resources devoted to those activities.

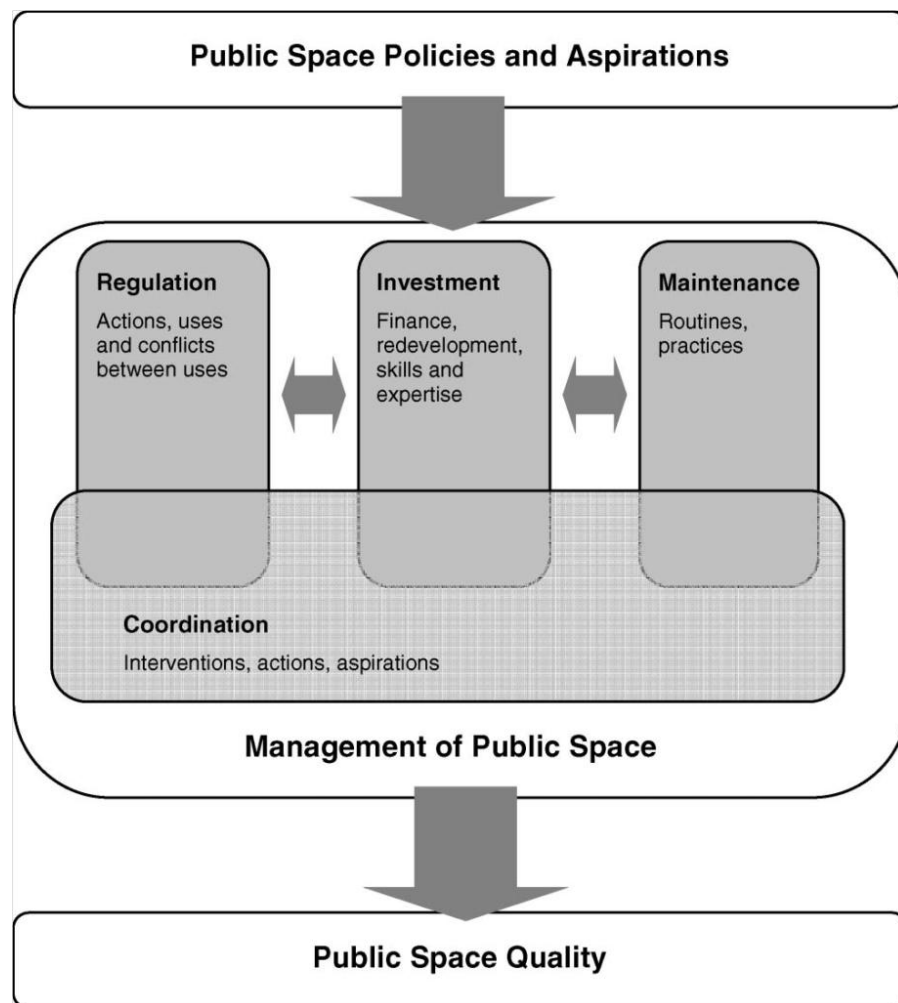


Figure 1. Public space and its key dimensions (Source: De Magalhães and Carmona, 2009)

- *The coordination of interventions in public space* – Because regulation, maintenance and resourcing are likely to involve a wide array of people and organisations, directly or indirectly, there is a necessity to coordinate mechanisms to ensure that the agents in charge of those activities pull in the same direction.

Public space management is normally associated with the public sector and local government (de Magalhães & Carmona, 2009). Past practices show that urban governance plays a major role in the management of public space. Although public spaces have traditionally been owned and managed by the public agencies (Carmona & de Magalhães, 2006), the public space management model has changed over the past decades. De Magalhães and Carmona (2009, p. 112) argue that “public space management has not been immune to changes affecting public service delivery and urban governance”, with an increasing control of public space by community-based organisations and private sectors. The rise of alternative models of public space management suggests a shift from local government structures to involve a range of other stakeholders. There is, however, a growing concern over the private control of public spaces (Bonilla, 2012), which although aims at a better management, has led to the commodification and homogenisation of space (Zukin, 1995). Carr et al. (1992, p. 361) make a cautious note on increasing private control of the public space that “it tends to put [public] space in the hands of those who view the physical environment as a means for creating profits”.

### Why is the management of public space important?

The quality of public space is not only influenced by its provision and design, but also by the model and degree of its management. De Magalhães and Carmona (2009, p. 112) argue that “all public spaces, no matter how inclusive, democratic and open, require some form of management so that they can fulfil their various roles effectively”. The management of public space thus enables the space to fulfil its function as a venue for social contacts through regular maintenance and the regulations of use, while keeping it safe and inviting for the users.

Most scholars agree that there is a decline of public realm in modern cities, which has been generally attributed to the lack of management of public space (see Banerjee, 2001; Gehl & Gemzoe, 2001; Jacobs, 1961; Newman, 1973; Tibbalds, 2001; Trancik, 1986). Dempsey and Burton (2012) notice that there are examples of many modern cities where public spaces are subject to poor management and maintenance practices, leading to the loss of comfort and safety during their use. In taking care of the neglected space, Tibbalds (2001) recognises the role of public space management and the responsibility of formal agencies. Undoubtedly, the importance of public space management has grown recently as “a critical examination of the management regimes shaping public space and its use has been added to the concerns with design and ownership that have so far dominated much of the debate” (de Magalhães & Carmona, 2009, p. 111). There is now a growing consensus among scholars that an effective management of public space can improve the quality of modern life and create sustainable urban environments (Al-Hagla, 2008).

### RESEARCH APPROACH

This research employs a case study approach and uses Kathmandu as a study area to explore the challenges in the management of contemporary public spaces, with a focus on urban neighbourhoods. Kathmandu is currently comprised of a diverse urban form, with the development of at least three types of new neighbourhoods. First, the lack of urban development control has resulted in the spontaneous growth of the most new neighbourhoods. Second, a small number of planned neighbourhoods have emerged through the efforts of the government agencies, utilising Site and Services and Land Pooling schemes. Recently, as an alternative to the unplanned development of the new neighbourhoods, private housing companies have developed a number of gated communities in different locations of Kathmandu.

Based on the emerging types of urban neighbourhoods and their contextual features, two planned new neighbourhoods were selected for the purpose of the Kathmandu case study that include Gongabu Residential Area (GRA) and Civil Homes, Phase III (CH – III). Figure 2 provides the context and locations of each study area in Kathmandu. The GRA is a planned residential neighbourhood developed by the government using the Land Pooling scheme, with the objective of controlling haphazard urban growth. The CH – III represents the development of a gated community in Kathmandu by a private housing company.

Although they form a large portion of the current urban development in Kathmandu, no selection of the unplanned new neighbourhoods was made in the study area for two reasons. First, public space hardly exists in these neighbourhoods, except for the streets, which are beyond the scope of this paper. Second, research has found that local communities in the unplanned new neighbourhoods are relatively less active in overall neighbourhood management and community building as compared to the planned new neighbourhoods (Chitrakar, 2016). These factors imply that it is less relevant to examine the management of public space in the unplanned new neighbourhoods.



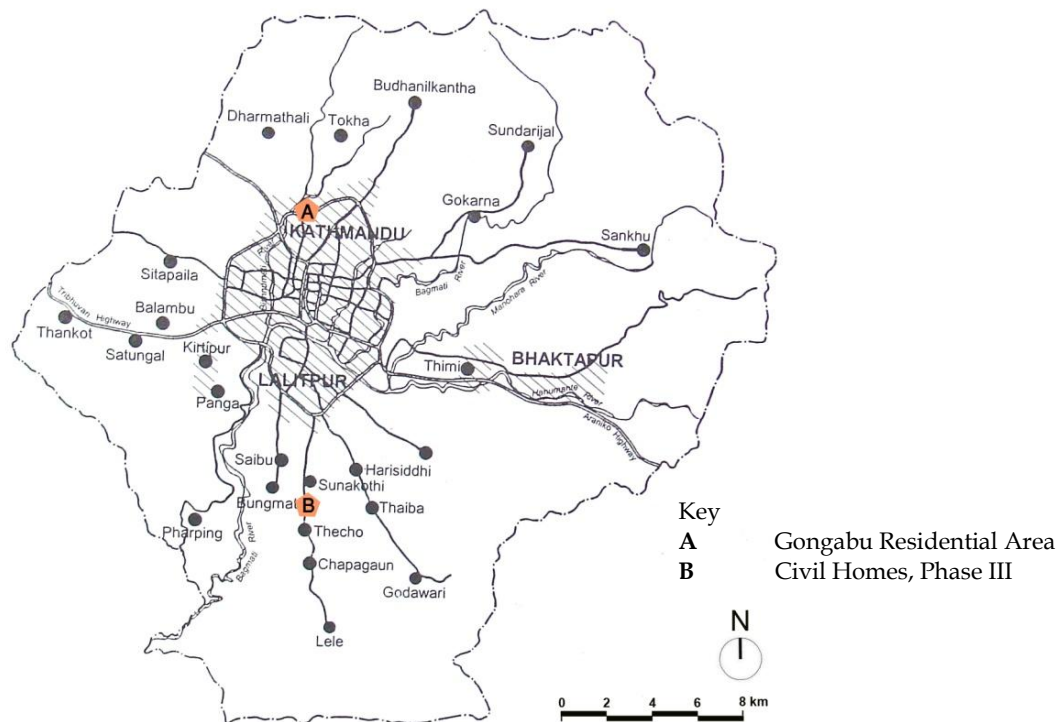


Figure 2. Map of Kathmandu showing locations of the neighbourhoods selected in the study (Source: Modified from KMC/World Bank 2001)

### Site observations

Site observations were conducted in the selected new neighbourhoods to obtain the first hand impression of the existing public spaces in terms of their ongoing management and maintenance. During the site observations, the physical conditions of public space were examined to see if they support potential use and neighbourhood social activities. Data from the observations were gathered on the physical design issues of public space such as the location within the neighbourhood, access to the space and spatial/design features. Another important feature examined in the observations was the current level of use and if any conflicts between the activities exist. No formal pattern was followed in the observation as it remained largely unstructured. The observations provided an overall picture of public space management within the study sites/neighbourhoods and the data were later verified with interview data.

### Interviews

Face-to-face and in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 neighbourhood residents, including key informants, across the two new neighbourhoods. The key informants were those residents who have been assuming or have assumed an active role in the local community-based organisations. Some of the key informants were the ones who posed in-depth information on the development history of a neighbourhood. These informants were personally approached and asked for the interviews. Snowball sampling was employed to identify other participants. The selection of the interview participants was made to represent different gender, age groups, ethnic backgrounds, occupations and the length of residence so that the sample represents a larger section of the residents. Most interviews were conducted at participants' residences. The interviews remained open-ended and the questions were structured around: a) ownership and control of public space; b) the current use of public spaces and its regulations; c) the maintenance of space; and d) managing financial resources for public space management. Interviews were conducted in Nepalese, which were later translated and transcribed into English.

## DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE IN KATHMANDU'S NEW NEIGHBOURHOODS

Traditional towns of Kathmandu boast a fine provision of public spaces that are distributed over the entire settlement, offering a physical setting for a significant amount of urban social life. These traditional public spaces have a constructive design inherent in their outstanding ability to support both daily life and socio-cultural events (Chitrakar, 2006; Hosken, 1974; Shrestha, Khatry, Sharma, & Ansari, 1986; Tiwari, 1989). Most notably, public space still remains the heart of the traditional urban neighbourhoods in Kathmandu and is widely in use at this date (Chitrakar, 2006; Shokoohy, 1994). With houses clustered around a community square, the traditional neighbourhoods have been planned to support a gregarious living pattern of their inhabitants (Pant & Funo, 2007). However, due to the lack of proper urban development initiatives and the recent socio-economic changes, including the changing urban governance at local levels (Chitrakar, Baker, & Guaralda, 2014), the past practices of both the formation and utilisation of public space have been significantly transformed in the recent decades.

Kathmandu is currently one of the fastest growing cities in South Asia (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013) where the recent growth has been poorly controlled, resulting in the haphazard development of most new areas. The Kathmandu Valley Environment Outlook (ICIMOD et al., 2007, p. 54) highlights “uncontrolled urban sprawl” and “unplanned land subdivision” as two major issues related to the current urban growth. Adhikari (1998) argues that there are a number of problems in the planning and design of the new urban areas. These problems have been manifest in the physical environment of new neighbourhoods that have negatively affected the quality of urban life and social well-being. Observations indicate that public space in these neighbourhoods have reduced dramatically so that there is a low provision of communal areas. The unplanned new neighbourhoods have practically no open spaces (Adhikari, 1998), where as there are noticeable planning and design problems with public spaces in the planned new neighbourhoods, including the gated communities (Shrestha, 2005). This suggests that the current urban growth has not been conducive to integrating public space into the development of new neighbourhoods (Chitrakar et al., 2016). The development of contemporary public space has failed to receive adequate priority in the growth process although it has been an agenda of Kathmandu's urban development for decades among the scholars and policy makers (see Adhikari, 1998; ICIMOD et al., 2007; KMC/World Bank, 2001; KVTDC, 2002; Pradhan, 2003; Sharma, 2006; Shrestha & Shrestha, 2006).

## MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE IN KATHMANDU'S NEW NEIGHBOURHOODS

### Gongabu Residential Area

Spread over an area of 14.2 ha, the GRA is the first planned contemporary residential neighbourhood in Kathmandu. It is located in the northern peripheral area of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and consists of a total of 406 residential plots. The Land Pooling project for the development of the residential area was introduced by the Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC) (now, Kathmandu Valley Development Authority) in 1988 and completed in 1996. The local people of this new residential community have migrated from both within and outside the Kathmandu Valley. The demographic profile of the residents, therefore, indicates a mixed composition of different ethnic groups that mainly include Newar, Brahmin, Chhetri, Gurung, Thakali and Magar. Despite the existing ethnic diversity, the residents have been trying to “organise” themselves within a community. This is evident from the formation of a number of local community-based organisations that are active within the neighbourhood in managing and improving the residential community. Established in 1999, Gongabu Residential Area Reformation Committee (GRARC) is one of them with a central role and formal responsibility in neighbourhood management.

In the GRA, a total of 14 plots of varying sizes have been developed as public open spaces (see Figure 3). This turns out to be 4.9% of the total developed area, which is almost twice the actual requirement (according to the by-laws, the open space requirement for the project area of more than 5.09 ha is 2.5% of the site area). Observation of the master plan, however, reveals that the open spaces have been laid out randomly and exist in a fragmented way. Most notably, a series of five major pockets of open spaces have been laid out along the existing high voltage transmission line running east – west across the neighbourhood where the construction of building is risky and not practical. Likewise, two buildings exist for community purposes in the GRA. One is a two-storey building located in the mid-eastern edge of the neighbourhood that houses an office of a local community-based organisation, a small multipurpose hall and store rooms. A second community building is a three-storey structure located in the northern edge.



Figure 3. Site Plan of the GRA showing the allocation of open spaces (Source: Modified from KVTDC)

Following the handover of the Land Pooling project to the local community, the GRARC and other supporting neighbourhood organisations have been engaged in the management of the neighbourhood and its public spaces. All public land and buildings in the GRA are under the jurisdiction of the GRARC and the local government at ward level does not have any role in their management. Although working actively in the community for the past 17 years, the GRARC, however, seems to have a less constructive role in public space management. The lack of proper management appears to be one of the main causes of the emergent problems with the use of public space. Some key issues of public space management in this neighbourhood are discussed as follows.

### ***Controlling the accessibility of public space and the regulation of use***

In the GRA, the accessibility of the public open spaces and community buildings has been heavily controlled by the GRARC. Only the temple area, an open space with a badminton court and one of the two community buildings are open to the residents on a daily basis. Other public spaces have been either locked up (either temporarily or permanently) or leased out to the private parties. The temple area is not open to the public around the clock, but the management committee has set up opening hours and opens twice a day (in the morning and evening). The community building is open between 10 am to 5 pm.

The GRA management has been struggling with regulating the use of public spaces. Preventing the use of public spaces by unwanted people and in an improper way appears to be a key issue in controlling their accessibility. The executive members of the GRARC explained that they have witnessed numerous cases of extreme misuse of the local parks and open spaces in the past. One of them explained:

There is always a risk in public place. People may go offensive. For example, we opened up the central public space for a fixed hour to play cricket. But there were children from other neighbourhoods, coming and playing in an irresponsible manner. We also found them smoking and using offensive language while chatting, more than playing cricket. They climbed the boundary walls and smashed the windows... and we have been asked to close the park by the residents living nearby.

Such cases of the misuse of public spaces appear to have persuaded the committee to make the decision of closing them or limit the opening hours. They believe that the problem lies in making them fully accessible to the public. However, the lack of access has undoubtedly led to the limited use of public space on a daily basis.

In addition to controlling the accessibility, another decision made by the GRARC to regulate the use of public spaces was to lease them out for non – public purposes. A number of open space plots and a community building have been leased out to private parties with a financial return to the committee. The amount of open spaces under the lease comes out to be approximately 3,600 m<sup>2</sup>, which is 50% of the total available space. The central public space has been leased out to a private college located nearby for parking. Three other open spaces have been leased out to a plant nursery. The GRARC argues that the current use of the open spaces as the plant nurseries is compatible with the requirements of the KVTDC of having green spaces within the Land Pooling development. Another public land located opposite to the central public space across the main road is also on lease and consists of a privately owned swimming pool. One of the community buildings has been leased out to a private medical centre.

During the interviews, the executive members argued in favour of leasing out the public land and building. They tried to make it clear that they are doing this to “manage” the spaces properly. They consider that leaving these spaces as they were in the past is just not appropriate.



### **Maintenance of public space**

Most public spaces that are accessible to the residents lack regular maintenance to render them fully usable. Field observation indicated that the only open space in the GRA that has been maintained in a fairly good condition is the temple area, whereas other open spaces are in a less satisfactory condition (see Figure 4). For example, the floor conditions of most of these spaces are not favourable for generating use and activity due to the lack of proper finishing material. They are muddy during a monsoon and dusty at other times. The grasses in the green spaces have been left uncut in much of the area and the boundary walls are being damaged. Furthermore, the space's furniture and other landscape features, including the flower beds, also lack regular maintenance.

The members of the GRARC during the interviews acknowledged the need for maintenance of the existing public open spaces. It appears that the maintenance of public space has been hindered by both the negligence of the GRARC and the lack of financial resources. Yet, some recent initiatives include an attempt to pave stone slabs and construct public toilets in the central public space. The physical condition of badminton courts would also be improved and prepared with lights for use in the evening hours.



Figure 4. Images of the central public space (left) and the temple area in the GRA (Source: Authors, 2014)

### **Financial resources for public space management**

The GRA lacks adequate financial resources for public space management. The current sources of income of the GRARC are limited and include revenues from the lease, membership with the GRARC, open space utilisation and profit from the social events. According to the committee members, there are no regular funds coming from local government for the development of the neighbourhood. Although the committee received partial funding from the KVTDC in the past for the development of physical infrastructures such as the roads and underground sewerage lines, the financial support is limited to one – off contribution made for major works only. Thus, the development and maintenance of public spaces rely heavily on local financial resources, which are inadequate at present.

### **Civil Homes, Phase III**

Introduced in 2003 by Civil Homes Private Limited, a private housing company based in Kathmandu, the CH – III is a commercial housing development located in Lalitpur district. It is spread over an area of 6.4 ha and is one of the largest developments of individual houses (196 housing units) in the country by the private sector. A majority of the people in the CH – III are migrants to Kathmandu, whereas others have relocated from within the city. The ethnic composition of the residents mainly includes Newar, Brahmin, Chhetri, Gurung and Rai. Civil Homes Residential Society (CHORES) is the only formal organisation within the CH – III that represents its local community. The CHORES was established in 2007 with

an objective of managing the residential community, with a lead role in housing management and the management of community facilities, including public space.

A total of eight plots with an area of 2826.31 m<sup>2</sup> have been developed as public open space in the CH – III (see Figure 4). This is 4.4% (almost twice the actual requirement) of the total developed area. Although the total amount of open space appears to be reasonable and the two parks (the East Park and the West Park) are centrally located, the overall spatial organisation lacks proper planning and distribution. The East Park and the West Park have been symmetrically arranged along the axis of the main entry road. The rest of the open space pockets are located in the peripheral areas, making them comparatively less accessible to the larger portion of the residents. The open spaces formed in such locations do not have a levelled surface, and thus, appear to be less suitable for use. At the same time, most open spaces consist of very little or no elements of interest.



Figure 5. Site plan of the CH - III showing the existing public open spaces and other community facilities (Source: Modified from Civil Homes webpage)

In addition to the outdoor spaces, the CH – III also houses a community centre that is situated in the northern part of the housing area (see Figure 6). Opened one and a half years

ago, the community centre is a recently established facility that consists of several amenities such as a community office space, a convenient store, a restaurant, a fitness centre, a table tennis playing area and a community hall.



Figure 6. Images of the East Park (left), the West Park (middle) and the community centre in the CH – III (Source: Authors, 2014)

During the fieldwork, some critical issues regarding the management of the housing community were revealed. By that time, the responsibility of housing management had not been transferred to the community since all the housing units had not been sold out. The CH – III management was thus in a “transitional” phase, where a “dual management” was being practised. The company was still responsible for its overall management, including housing security and the supply of water and electricity, whereas the CHORES contributed to a small share of it in the management of solid waste and the frequent cleaning of the streets and parks. The residents reported that there were ambiguities with no clear allocation of responsibilities in many tasks, resulting in an ongoing conflict between the community and the company.

The problems with the housing management are reflected in the present condition of public space. Field observations reveal that most public spaces lack a regular maintenance. On the other hand, a long term impact is also likely to be seen in the sustainability of community facilities, due to the low turnout of residents. Managing financial resources for the management of public space is another significant issue of housing management in the CH - III. The CHORES realises the need for an immediate takeover of the housing management from the company to address these issues.

### **Maintenance of public space**

Most residents in the interviews expressed their concern over the lack of regular maintenance of the public spaces – a case also evident during the site observations. Even if there is a relatively good provision of open space and community facilities, the lack of regular maintenance appears to be a problem in the CH – III. The residents claimed that the neighbourhood was cleaner before most houses were sold out, and it is the negligence of the housing company that led to the lack of cleaning. One of the executive members of the CHORES also admitted the issue, but blamed it on the company. During several months of field visits, it was noticed that nothing was being done for maintaining the physical facilities, except for the cutting of branches of a few trees along the main street. A 56-year-old housewife shared the same observation:

Regarding the maintenance, you might have observed that there is nothing happening at present. The grasses are left uncut and can be noticed right from the sidewalks at the entrance.

The residents mentioned that the last time the cleaning of the two parks was done was about two years ago through their own initiative. They believe this step by the local residents

made the company even more reluctant in conducting regular maintenance. The residents explained that the company does not appear to be willing to respond to the complaints on the maintenance issues at this stage.

### ***Sustainability of community facilities***

During the interviews, the residents also raised concerns over the sustainability of the recently established community facilities, mainly due to the low turnout of people. Observations reveal that the fitness centre has only 21 members or users - the outdoor swimming pool is seasonal in use. According to the CHORES, the community facilities have been operating on a semi – business model and running on a cost to cost basis. Even facilities such as the convenient store and the restaurant do not appear to be making profit. Some residents claimed that since these facilities are unable to collect the running costs, they have been subsidised by the housing company, and were used as a “show – off” item in the sale of the housing units.

This suggests that if the housing community is unable to run the community facilities properly, they are bound to be closed in the near future when the housing management is taken over from the company. Considering the low turnout, some residents have suggested to open the community facilities to the outsiders. One interviewee, a 42-year-old male resident, claimed that they will never run on profit if used by the CH – III residents only. This appears to be true, considering the present number of people actually living in the housing area. However, not all the residents agree with this, including the CHORES. The CHORES disagrees with the use of facilities by the outsiders from a security point of view as they believe it is against the principles of a gated community.

### ***Financial resources for public space management***

Financial resources are managed in housing communities from contributions made by the households. Although this management fund is an important part of housing management, the CHORES is yet to devise a plan of action. Nonetheless, the community appears to be working towards it by setting up a task force recently to prescribe a “best practices” model. Housing developments in Kathmandu have generally adopted two models for managing financial resources: a) collecting a one – off and large sum of funds (usually during the sale of housing units); and b) collecting monthly fees. According to the project manager of the CH - III, it could not adopt the former model as the buyers were reluctant to contribute, although the company aimed for it in the past. At the same time, it was not considered necessary to collect the monthly fees from the households from the time when the housing community was established. Creating a housing management fund is, thus, something the CH – III community needs to consider before the company leaves.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Findings from this research have identified several problems in the management of contemporary public space in Kathmandu. Controlling the accessibility of public space to regulate the use appears to be a major concern and also a likely typical issue of public space management in most planned new neighbourhoods. Studies have found that an urban space needs to be accessible to the users, both physically and visually, in order to generate public life and activity (Whyte, 1980; PPS, 2000). However, due to the problems with neighbourhood management, the existing public spaces and community buildings of new neighbourhoods are becoming less accessible to the public (Carmona et al., 2008). The publicness and utility of open spaces have been compromised in several occasions as these spaces operate in the discretion of neighbourhood management committees to control their access and use. On the other hand, the commercial use of public spaces also renders them inaccessible, suggesting that there is an increasing private control of public space with potential disadvantages for neighbourhood residents (Carr, 1992). These instances of the



lack of access have significantly reduced the scope of the use of public space in Kathmandu's new neighbourhoods.

The use of public space has also been affected by the lack of regular maintenance. Researchers argue that the physical condition of public space can influence its use (Carr et al., 1992; Gehl, 1987; Whyte, 1980). In the new neighbourhoods of Kathmandu, the present condition of public space is largely unsatisfactory due to poor maintenance as evident in littered spaces, unpaved surfaces and broken walls (Tibbalds, 2001). The poorly maintained public spaces have failed to invite people as the users do not feel safe and comfortable in such spaces (Dempsey & Burton, 2012).

Since public space management is basically governance sphere (de Magalhães & Carmona, 2009), the root cause of the problems lies in weak urban governance at the neighbourhood level. It is evident from the GRA that the local government at municipality or ward levels do not have a direct role in both the development and management of urban neighbourhoods. The CH – III case suggests that the commercial nature of housing development may lead to a weak neighbourhood management structure, due to the likely conflicts between the developers and the community that are emerging from profit oriented development initiatives. In both cases, the consequences can be seen in the formation of a poor neighbourhood management regime, with direct consequences on public space management.

Against such a background, the local community-based organisations have been forced to take a role in neighbourhood management, indicating the changing model of public space management (de Magalhães & Carmona, 2009). However, the findings suggest that these local organisations have limitations in terms of both managerial and financial capabilities. Even if the local organisations are relatively active, their current efforts have been largely unproductive due to the lack of technical knowledge or a proper plan of action. The management of public space does not appear to be sound as clearly evident from the current situation of public spaces and community buildings. Indeed, the local organisations of new neighbourhoods are struggling with all aspects of public space management.

An inability to manage financial resources is equally responsible for the current poor management of public space. While the financial contribution made by the local government agencies is limited, the case of the Land Pooling development in the GRA reveals that the community-based organisations do not have a good source of income. The poor financial capability has thus forced the local organisations to seek alternative sources. This is one of the reasons that commercial motives are becoming a dominating aspect in public space management as several open space plots and a community building have been leased to private parties for financial return. In case of the CH – III, the lack of an established management fund has been a major hindrance in managing financial resources. This indicates that the new neighbourhoods within the private housing developments struggle to manage financial resources even if the households are able to contribute towards it.

### **What are the emerging challenges?**

In Kathmandu, the unsatisfactory development of public spaces (Adhikari, 1998; Shrestha, 2005; Chitrakar et al., 2016) has been further aggravated by their poor management that offers at least three challenges. Since research findings suggest that there is an important and growing role of local community-based organisations in the management of new neighbourhoods and their public spaces, the performance of such local organisations needs to be enhanced. There is a challenge to strengthen their roles in order to achieve a strong governance structure. Another challenge is to generate adequate funds for public space management at the neighbourhood level using alternative sources, particularly in non-gated communities, where the local residents are relatively unable to contribute financially and the government or other agencies have limited contributions. Finally, the key challenge remains to satisfactorily use the existing public spaces to enhance public life and activities through the mitigation of the problems caused by control and regulations and poor

maintenance. These challenges that are emerging in Kathmandu not only confirm that the lack of management of public space is a critical issue of urban development with commonalities existing across geographical regions, but also add more concerns to the problems of urban development that demand adequate consideration from all stakeholders.

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## AUTHORS

### Rajjan Man Chitrakar

Sessional Academic

School of Design, Creative Industries Faculty

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Email address: razn77@hotmail.com; rajjan.chitrakar@qut.edu.au

### Douglas C Baker

Professor

School of Civil Engineering and the Built Environment, Faculty of Science and Engineering

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Email address: d2.baker@qut.edu.au

### Mirko Guaralda

Senior Lecturer

School of Design, Creative Industries Faculty

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Email address: .m.guaralda@qut.edu.au